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INFO RUEHTN/AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN PRIORITY 7603  
RUEH DU/AMCONSUL DURBAN PRIORITY 1667  
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RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 000383

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR P, NEA/IR, DRL/NESCA, AF/S

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KNUC](#) [PARM](#) [NPT](#) [SA](#)  
SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA DIVIDED INTERNALLY ON IRAN

REF: A. SECSTATE 12108  
[1](#)B. PRETORIA 00325

Classified By: Ambassador Donald H. Gips for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: In conversations and meetings in Cape Town on the margins of the opening of Parliament, the Ambassador heard repeatedly that the SAG is conflicted on how to deal with Iran with respect to human rights and nuclear non-proliferation. While they are mindful of South Africa's dependence on the Islamic Republic for oil and of other commercial interests, South African decision-makers are concerned about the Government of Iran's (GOI) severe human rights violations. Deputy Minister in the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim put it plainly, "We haven't sorted this out yet." End summary.

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CONFLICTING PRIORITIES  
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[1](#)2. (C) In a conversation with the Ambassador, Ebrahim acknowledged that South Africa is very divided internally about Iran. When the Ambassador pushed for clarity on the nature of the division, Ebrahim did not elaborate and said simply, "We haven't sorted this out yet."

[1](#)3. (C) During a separate meeting, Speaker of the National Assembly Max Sisulu asserted that his visit to Iran was simply a Parliamentary visit. He dodged the Ambassador's questions about the GOI's human rights violations. On the nuclear issue, Sisulu said that South Africa told the GOI it would support its peaceful nuclear ambitions. When the Ambassador expressed the USG's incredulity that the GOI's pursuit of nuclear capability is for peaceful purposes, Sisulu avoided further discussion of the issue. He did point out that cellular network operator MTN and the South African Coal, Oil and Gas Corporation (Sasol) are huge players in the Iranian marketplace.

[1](#)4. (C) Former Western Cape Premier Ebrahim Rasool, who was part of the delegation that traveled to Tehran in early February, shared more details during a hallway conversation. Rasool confirmed that the GOI was furious with South Africa for the SAG's abstention on the Iran vote in the Third Committee session of UNGA, and for not at least alerting the GOI that the RSA was changing its vote. He also insisted that the USG's pressure is backfiring because President Ahmadinejad simply uses it to unite his citizens against the West, adding that international pressure does not matter since the government is effectively crushing the internal opposition. Rasool claims that the Chairman of the Iranian Parliament, Ali Larijani, would have been president except that he comes from the wrong tribe. He feels that Larijani and two of his brothers are the best hope for a more stable

Iran. While in Tehran, Rasool tried to arrange meetings with the opposition, but claims he could not secure any because everyone is too afraid to talk.

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COMMENT  
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15. (C) During the Mbeki Presidency, SAG officials tended to emphasize both South Africa's economic relations with Iran and a view of the Islamic Republic which portrayed it as part of the anti-Western forces with which Mbeki sought to identify his foreign policy. While President Zuma has begun to distance his administration from this latter tendency, the SAG still appears to bend over backwards to portray Iranian actions in a favorable light. That, and the continuing importance of South African-Iranian trade relations continue to be weighed in the balance against Iran's appalling human rights record. Given these competing pressures, the SAG is, at least for now, unlikely to denounce Iranian human rights violations publicly, or challenge Iran on non-proliferation issues. We, nonetheless, intend to continue pushing SAG officials on these issues. End comment.  
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